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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8507
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 6063
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0107
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0105
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000219

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DOE FOR GPERSON, CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS, SRENENDER, DFIELDS
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [ENRG](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: SECURITY OFFICIALS DISCUSS DELTA, HOSTAGES

REF: LAGOS 63 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) Summary: Nigerian officials including the National Security Advisor, Chief of Defense Staff, and Director of the State Security Service met with a select group of Ambassadors on February 2. The meeting was requested by the diplomats to express concern about their nationals who are at present being held hostage and to ask Nigerian government representatives for their thoughts on the way forward. For their part, the government officials stressed that any GON operations to free the hostages would be undertaken with care, so as not to endanger civilian lives. They also complained that some actions by parts of the international community, including ransom payments and travel bans, are counterproductive. End Summary.

12. (C) On February 2, the Ambassadors of the United States, United Kingdom, Lebanon, Italy, and China, accompanied by the Philippine Consul General (whose Ambassador is currently in the Delta) met with a team of Nigerian security officials to express concerns about their nationals who are currently being held captive in the Niger Delta. Nigerian participants included the National Security Advisor (NSA) General Abdullahi S. Mukhtar, the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) General Martin Luther Agwai, the Director of the State Security Service (SSS) Lateef K. Are, the Director General of the Nigerian Intelligence Agency (NIA) Ambassador Uche Okeke, the Deputy Inspector General of Police and the Police Director of Intelligence Mr. Garba.

13. (C) General Mukhtar opened by saying that each hostage-taking incident is "a nightmare" for President Obasanjo and the government of Nigeria. He admitted that the problems in the Niger Delta have remained unsolved for too long (and said that President Obasanjo government was the first Chief of State to admit this) but noted that there are also criminal facets to the problem. The NSA counseled patience, because "if we rush in to rescue hostages, lives will be lost." The main purpose of any government operation,

according to Mukhtar, is to save civilian lives. General Agwai, the Chief of Defense Staff, promised that any military operations would take place under the rule of law, within the rules of engagement set by the civilian government, and in compliance with human rights principles. He also thanked the United States and United Kingdom for providing military assistance.

14. (C) SSS Director Are spoke at some length about the Obasanjo government's efforts to address the Niger Delta issue, including the increase of the federal revenue derivation for the Delta from 3 percent in 1999 to 13 percent today. Mr. Are said that the militia groups in the Delta are fragmented. Some advocate full regional independence, some want an increase in federal resources given to the Delta, and others are merely criminals. According to Mr. Are, the Nigerian government is talking to all three categories of militants. Are complained that some actions taken by the international community actually aid the hostage takers. He said that payment of ransom, calls for quick resolution of kidnappings, and travel bans merely give the militants greater power and leverage. The SSS Director was pointed in his criticism of a recent ban by the Philippine government on all travel to Nigeria by its citizens. Are stated that ransoms of 585 million (currency unspecified) were paid in 2006. (Note: He did not specify by whom the payments were made or how he arrived at the figure of 585 million.)

15. (C) Mr. Are complained that the private companies too often deal directly with the militants rather than with legally constituted authorities. Other Nigerian participants echoed this criticism and added that company memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local communities are dysfunctional. As the MOUs are not coordinated, they often cause rivalries between neighboring communities which sometimes lead to unrest or hostage taking. The Italian

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Ambassador responded that the Embassies cannot control the actions of private companies.

16. (C) Ambassador Campbell said that he appreciated the depth of concern demonstrated by President Obasanjo and the Nigerian government in these matters. He agreed with and endorsed the statement that the goal of any government operation must be to save lives, and congratulated the GON on the restraint it has shown thus far. Ambassador noted that the United States government never pays ransom and has a strict policy against doing so. He also explained that during these hostage incidents, the USG only deals with the legal Nigerian authorities to resolve the crisis.

17. (C) The British High Commissioner explained that the diplomatic community looks to the Nigerian government to protect expatriates on its soil, and when that protection fails, to secure their release from captivity without endangering civilian lives. The Chinese Ambassador said that prior to 2007, his nationals had never been abducted in the Delta and he expressed hope that the Chinese in captivity would be released before the upcoming New Year's celebration. He also said that the Secretary to the State Government (SSG) in Bayelsa had been very helpful. The Philippine Consul General explained that his country's recent ban on travel to Nigeria came directly from President Arroyo. General Mukhtar asked that the travel ban be reviewed, and protested that a ban on travel to the entire country was ludicrous when the problems have only occurred in 2 or 3 states.

18. (C) COMMENT: Perhaps the most important outcome of this meeting with Nigeria's security chiefs is the government's reaffirmation of its policy of restraint. Though it is difficult to be patient, the National Security Advisor stated, patience is necessary to avoid military actions that could endanger the lives of expatriate hostages and other civilians.

